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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000092

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [VT](#)  
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: DEPUTY FM DISCUSSION WITH SENATOR ALLEN FOCUSES  
ON IRAN; CONCERNS AND POSSIBLE HINT

REF: (a) Vatican 077, (b) Vatican 051, (c) Vatican 067, (d) Vatican 064

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,  
EXEC, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary. Holy See deputy FM and visiting Senator Allen had a long and occasionally pointed discussion May 28 on Iran and other topics. Parolin appeared intent on using the meeting to remind the USG of the Holy See's opposition to military action against Iran, and also seemed to signal interest in a possible Holy See role as an interlocutor with Iran. End summary.

12. (C) Senator George Allen, accompanied by DCM, called on Monsignor Pietro Parolin on May 28. Parolin is the Undersecretary for Relations with States (the Holy See's equivalent to a deputy foreign minister). Parolin was accompanied by Monsignor Ettore Ballestrero, who covers a number of multilateral agencies. The meeting ran longer than expected, and included some pointed exchanges on Iran and disarmament, as well as briefer discussion of Iraq, the Middle East, and China.

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Iraq  
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13. (C) Senator Allen noted that he would be visiting Iraq in a few days, and commented on the importance he attached to the "four pillars of freedom": freedom of religion, freedom of expression, respect for private property, and rule of law. Responding to the first point, Parolin expressed the Holy See's concern about the Iraqi constitution and the primacy it gives to shari'a, a point the Holy See has repeatedly raised with us. No one talks about it much anymore, said Parolin, but we see it as a potential threat to the Christian presence in Iraq. Christians there feel unsafe, and are fleeing; since in general they are better educated and have relatives abroad, they are freer than others to consider emigrating. We don't want a Middle East without Christians, he said.

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Iran  
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14. (C) Parolin shifted to a discussion of Iran, noting that the Holy See has had diplomatic relations with Iran for 52 years -- "longer than with the United States". He cited a remark by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger suggesting that the

United States might wait 15 months for Iran to give up its nuclear weapons quest before turning to military means, and asked if this was the official USG position. Allen responded that it was not, and that the United States and Europe are working to prevent Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons capability by diplomatic means. He emphasized that our problem is not with the people of Iran but with its leaders, who persist in outrageous statements (e.g. about Israel) that call their rationality into question.

¶5. (C) The senator agreed that Iran had a right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful uses, but cited Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and extreme behavior as factors making its current nuclear quest very dangerous. Allen emphasized that while no responsible American government could absolutely forswear an ultimate recourse to force, this would truly be a last resort, not desired by anyone. Parolin spoke of the complexity of the situation, the consideration of national pride, and the existence of moderates as well as hard-liners in the Iranian government. The Holy See, for its part, urges Iran to work toward resolution of this issue in an IAEA framework.

¶6. (C) Senator Allen asked directly "do you trust them?" Parolin answered somewhat uncomfortably that the Holy See would like to trust everyone. He recalled telling EUR PDAS Kurt Volker (ref A) that the Holy See cannot see any reason for military action against Iran; instead, problems must be resolved through dialogue. Allen demurred, noting again that negotiations were certainly preferable, but that Iranian leaders needed to know that US patience is not unlimited and that the constant provocations of President Ahmadinejad could not pass unnoticed. Parolin pressed his case, urging that the US try an approach to build confidence and avoid the "logic of confrontation"; he repeated that the Holy See is "very, very concerned" about the consequences of a military conflict. Parolin did not have any specific recommendations for the USG other than to try to ease tensions rather than escalate them,

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and to seek to open Iranian society.

¶7. (C) DCM asked if Iran had expressed interest in such confidence building in its contacts with the Holy See, either in Rome or Teheran. Parolin said nothing specific had been mentioned, but that the Holy See stood ready to help. Senator Allen said that the Holy See's relatively good relations with Iran might enable it to play a helpful role. He observed that Ahmadinejad's letter to President Bush was seen in Washington as offensive, but he had heard others suggest it might have been well-intentioned. Parolin said there were rumors that Ahmadinejad might write to Pope Benedict XVI; if true, this could be an opportunity. He added that he could not predict how the Pope might respond to such a letter, and noted the Holy See's need to remain neutral. However, he emphasized that the Holy See was clear in its disapproval of the incendiary remarks by Iranian leaders. Both in January and at Easter, the pope -- unusually -- had replied with an open and categorical condemnation of Ahmadinejad's earlier denial of Israel's right to exist. Allen asked if the US should enter into direct dialogue with Iran. The main point, said Parolin, is to engage.

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Disarmament  
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¶8. (C) Parolin noted that the Holy See always favors disarmament. As Pope Benedict XV had lamented on the eve of WWI, those who have weapons feel impelled to use them; disarmament is the way to promote peace. Noting Allen's skepticism, Parolin conceded that complete disarmament was unrealistic, but at least further accumulation of weapons should be avoided. Balestrero spoke up, saying the US was in a unique

position in this regard. Pressed for details by Senator Allen, Balestrero said sometimes the US gives the impression that disarmament is not a top priority. At least, he said, no contradictory signals should be given to the cause of disarmament. (FYI, Ref D describes Holy See support for the Proliferation Security Initiative).

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Other Topics  
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¶9. (C) Parolin said the Holy See agrees with the international community entirely that Hamas must renounce violence, live up to its commitments, and recognize Israel's right to exist; the question, he said, is how to get there. Parolin wondered aloud whether the current US policy was the right path to get Hamas on board.

¶10. (C) Allen and Parolin discussed the gradual evolution of China, hoping it would lead in time to more democracy and religious freedom and less international obstructionism.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) What would normally have been a 20-minute meeting stretched over an hour, with Parolin and Balestrero occasionally pressing more directly than usual for them. (There were several points at which pauses in the conversation might well have led to the conclusion of the meeting, but instead led to further exchanges.) Parolin seemed particularly focused while discussing Iran, as though looking for signs that his message was hitting home, or perhaps hinting that the Holy See could help the US develop a dialogue with Iran. This is not the first such hint from the Holy See (ref B). Balestrero's unprompted intervention on disarmament was also a bit stronger than the typical delicacy of Holy See diplomacy. It was clear that both men considered Senator Allen to be an important interlocutor, and that they saw his visit as more than a routine courtesy call.

¶12. (U) Senator Allen did not have an opportunity to clear this message prior to his departure.

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